

Governor Lamont's Proposed Budget for 2023-24

Good afternoon, members of the Education and Appropriations Committee. My name is April N Perez and I live in 96 Golden Hill, Road. I am here to speak on the Governor's proposed Budget for Elementary & Secondary Education (HB6659).

- I'm a resident and taxpayer from Danbury.
- I'm a concern resident and am here to advocate for our public school system to receive the funding it needs to educate all our children.

I am here today both to ask that the legislature increase funding for Danbury Public Schools and not support funding for the proposed charter school in Danbury.

- I attended the Danbury Public School System since I was identified as a student with disabilities, my parents registered me to developmental Pre-K, I graduated from the academic program to continue my education at the Western Academy program, graduating from the program at 21 years of age as the law for students with disabilities allows it.
- I attended the Western Academy Program, I had to volunteer at the Bethel Health Center, our duty was to help the residents, change the beds, fill up the pitchers with water and bring it to the room we had an aid from the program who helped us with and supervised us every time we went to the Center.

One person wasn't enough to help and supervise but we had to adapt because our classroom was big but not enough to money to pay to hire staff.

The social worker who was on charge of the program left to work at another public school system because she would get pay more and work less hours. She had small children at the time. The financial situation is not new, I'm familiar because as a person with disabilities lack of funding is overboard but the Danbury School System is at a grated need because as we know, more and more children are been identify as having emotional or physical disabilities.

- Neither the city of Danbury nor the state have met their financial obligations to the public school system. Danbury Public Schools have not had a fully-funded municipal budget in nearly 20 years. The state's ECS formula has not been fully funded either, which has exacerbated the problem at the local level.
- This cumulative lack of funding has resulted in overcrowded schools, staffing issues, and budget cuts that have compounded over decades. Funding another model that will serve only a fraction (6%) of our students does not make fiscal sense and it harms most of the students that the school system serves.

- The district is working on providing choice to ALL high school students through the planning and development of a 2nd Danbury High School campus (the Career Academy) and the implementation of career pathways that incorporate experiential learning opportunities for students in areas of interest that will offer them stronger opportunities for employment after high school and advanced preparation for higher education if they choose to pursue that. Diverting district money to support a charter school will not allow the district to adequately fund this project, a project that when completed will serve all students and families in this city who attend public school.

In addition, a charter school in Danbury will contribute to the underlying funding problem in Danbury Public Schools by drawing more funds away from the public school system. A charter school will take much-needed money away from the our current schools and most of the children in Danbury in the following ways:

- Transportation costs of at least \$600,000 for 2 buses to transport an initial class of 110. To put this in perspective, this is the cost of hiring 3-4 much needed school counselors at the middle and high school level.
- Special education costs - this could mean diverting current staff to the charter school, or hiring special educators specifically for the charter school. Either way, it results in a significant additional cost to the school district in order to serve the same number of students it is serving now.
- School nurse and custodial staff for the charter school. Again, additional annual costs that need to be absorbed by the district in order to serve the same number of students.
- DPS will also lose the state funding for any students who enroll in the charter school, but the loss of those students will not result in a net-positive for the district in terms of space or funding. In other words, because students will come from across the district's schools, the shift will have no measurable positive impact on the current staffing/space needs of the district. Rather, it will only exacerbate the space and staffing issues by diverting much needed funds from the existing schools.

As a member of the Danbury Community and a graduated from the Danbury Public school System, I urge you to consider the damage it will cause our public school system and our students if financial support is provided to a facility that will compete with it for funding. If you want to put more education dollars into Danbury, please do it by providing funding to the public schools as we face the significant operating costs for a much-needed 2nd high school campus and program expansion at the high school level to prepare our students for the future.

Sincerely,

April N Perez